

NATO and the Cuban Crisis

by Under Secretary Ball¹

This conference meets at a time when the value and strength of the North Atlantic alliance have been severely tested. In recent weeks the alliance has witnessed a major confrontation between the power and aggressive intentions of the East and the strength and determination of the West. The immediate focus, as you all know, was a Caribbean island 90 miles off the American coast. The cause was the effort of the Soviet Union to extend its offensive striking force against the Western Hemisphere by secretly introducing missiles and bombers into Cuba.

This event, its implications, and the events that may follow—for the Cuban affair is not yet ended—all directly concern the Atlantic alliance. I propose this afternoon, therefore, to speak of certain of the lessons for NATO that may properly be derived from this experience.

Lessons Drawn From Cuban Crisis

For the past month I have been a member of a small group in Washington created to advise President Kennedy on the developing problems of the Cuban crisis. That crisis has served to set out in clear relief the central significance of the Atlantic alliance and the interrelationship of the problems it faces. Already it seems to me possible to draw from it three lessons—three precepts that we have all dimly perceived in the past but which emerge with striking clarity from the events of the past month.

First, it is clear more than it ever was in the past that the Atlantic nations are in the Cuban crisis together—as they must necessarily be in every major East-West confrontation.

¹ Address made before the NATO Parliamentarians Conference at Paris on Nov. 16 (press release 678).

In one sense, to be sure, Cuba is peculiarly a problem of the Western Hemisphere. But there can be no doubt whatever that the intrusion of nuclear weapons into that unfortunate small country posed as much of a threat to Europe as to America. These missiles were to have been targeted on the strategic deterrent forces of the United States. In the last analysis the security of Europe and America alike—indeed of the whole free world—rests on the strength of that deterrent.

It seems clear enough from this that in removing the offensive threat from Cuba we were unquestionably acting as much in Europe's interest as in our own. We are still acting in that common interest, and it would be wholly wrong to turn attention away from Cuba simply because the immediate danger of nuclear conflict seems to have been averted.

The Cuban crisis, in other words, is still with us—with all of us. And we would be involved together in any similar confrontation elsewhere in the free world. This was the point President Kennedy was making when, in his report to the American people on the Cuban situation, he said:²

Any hostile move anywhere in the world against the safety and freedom of peoples to whom we are committed—including in particular the brave people of West Berlin—will be met by whatever action is needed.

The *second* lesson of Cuba is the wisdom—indeed the necessity—of the measured response. There were, of course, several ways in which the United States and other nations in our hemisphere could have reacted to the sudden disclosure of a new and growing menace to the deterrent strength of the free world. The most direct and obvious way would have been to eliminate the

² BULLETIN of Nov. 11, 1962, p. 715.

offensive weapons by force—through a sudden air strike or an invasion. Such a response might have seemed clean, surgical, and definitive. We had ample power to achieve a decisive stroke with a minimum of cost.

But President Kennedy chose not to take such action. He made his decision with full awareness of the importance of what he was deciding—with full knowledge that it involved the interests not merely of the United States but of the whole free world. He chose instead a more limited response—a quarantine, interdicting the buildup of offensive weapons in Cuba.³ Through that choice we could avoid resort to an immediate use of force that might have led the United States and the Soviet Union, and with them their allies, up an ascending scale of violence.

That choice also enabled the President to gain time—time to consult with our allies about the future steps we should take, time also to seek a political solution. Lastly, it enabled him to keep—and he still keeps—an option for further pressure if the situation should require it.

In short, the President applied a doctrine of measured choice and thereby minimized the risk of nuclear incineration. By establishing the quarantine he developed an effective weapon, a weapon with economic as well as military implications, that may usefully be included in the growing arsenal that provides for the free world the widest spectrum of response to military and political threats.

The *third* lesson of Cuba is the need for quick reaction to sudden danger. We know very well that the effect of the quarantine would have been diminished if there had not been wholehearted and immediate cooperation from our European allies.

There are those who suppose that the requirements of speed and secrecy necessarily preclude all possibility of consultation. They are wrong. Time factors may render it difficult to consult on every step in a swiftly developing situation; they may telescope the exchange of views at moments of crisis, but they should not impair the continuum of the consultative process.

The Cuban crisis, in our view, makes manifest the need for a deeper, franker, and more continuous exchange of views. For by such exchanges we can block out in advance large areas of agreement

so that when the moment of crisis comes we will all instinctively move along similar lines.

The fact is that, if the nations of the alliance are to be able to respond with the necessary decisiveness to the challenges ahead, we must be able to act on the basis of solid planning directed at a great variety of contingencies. We are engaged in this planning in the case of Berlin—working through the North Atlantic Council and the quadripartite ambassadorial group in Washington. But I believe we can make more progress. I think we can and should develop further the technique of contingency planning, applying it across the board to situations of danger confronting the alliance.

For the peril we face is a common peril that springs from a common source. It is literally true, as article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty stipulates, that an attack at any point in the NATO area is an attack upon all of us. Not only is the peril common, but the response must be common; it must, in a word, be an Atlantic response. And it is along that guideline—the meeting of common peril by a common, Atlantic response—that we must shape the NATO alliance.

NATO's Adjustment to Change

It is no accident that the first major progress toward Atlantic unity came in the organization of military power. The danger to which the free states of the West were—and are—exposed is the massive threat of disciplined and aggressive communism, which commands one-third of the world's population. Any effective response to such a threat must be designed on a commensurate scale. Thus it has all along been clear that even a united Western Europe could not, by itself, mobilize sufficient resources to provide adequate security. Safety lay in combining the military power of Western Europe with the military power of the United States.

This was the situation that underlay the creation, 4 years after the war, of the Atlantic alliance. In the beginning what was provided under the North Atlantic Treaty had many of the characteristics of a classical defensive alliance; in essence it was an arrangement between the United States and Western European countries to join together for their common defense. Had the alliance remained static in this posture, it might well have followed the course of similar alliances in

³ For text of a proclamation, see *ibid.*, p. 717.

the past. Its lifespan would have been brief; its vigor would have diminished with time; and its internal coherence might have been critically weakened whenever East-West tension was temporarily relaxed.

The North Atlantic Treaty structure, which is of special concern to you as parliamentarians, is growing in a very different way. It has developed an inner life and an organic force of its own. And like all living organisms it has shown a capacity of adjustment to change. NATO has responded not only to changes in military technology but equally to changes in the economic and political shape of world relationships.

In the 13 years since the founding of NATO not a single inch of European territory has come under Communist domination. The alliance has been increased in membership and in geographic scope. It has kept pace with the rapid development of sophisticated weaponry. It has steadily augmented the strength at its command. Its institutions and staff have developed in capability and in confidence. The North Atlantic Council has come to function as a broad consultative organ, treating, besides military questions, political issues of the keenest importance and greatest variety.

In short, NATO has undergone a profound transformation into a major element in the Atlantic partnership. It has never been more significant than it is today. For NATO is, in the military field, what the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is becoming in the economic field. It is nothing less than the structure within which the military aims of the partnership will take on form and substance.

The Progress of Western Europe

Paralleling the growth of the Atlantic defensive structure, we have seen the brilliant progress of Western Europe, now a strong and prosperous community moving toward greater economic and political unity. This development has had a striking effect not only within the alliance but indeed on the Soviet bloc and in the uncommitted world. It has revived Europe spiritually as well as economically. It promises still further institutional growth that can provide new lessons in statecraft for the rest of the world.

It is, I am certain, apparent to us all that the

new Europe has succeeded only because it could evolve in an atmosphere of security. General [Lauris] Norstad made that point eloquently in an American television broadcast on Veterans Day, when he emphasized that the great growth in the European economy reflected the spirit of confidence made possible by the North Atlantic alliance. The economic miracle of Europe during the past 10 years, in other words, could have developed only behind the shield of NATO.

We in the United States have been deeply impressed by the achievements of the European Economic Community. The lonely position of preponderance in the free world that we occupied at the end of the war was never congenial to our tastes. From the beginning we consistently encouraged measures for the integration of Europe, and we look forward today to a Europe more and more united, more and more prosperous, and speaking with a single voice on a widening area of subject matter. We welcome a Europe that can serve as an equal partner with the United States in an Atlantic partnership.

Yet, at the same time, we recognize that the shift in the allocation of power represented by the advent of a new and strong Europe will inevitably cause some problems of adjustment on both sides of the Atlantic. It will necessitate some change not only in the attitudes but in the habits of both Americans and Europeans.

For America, the development of a powerful European partner must mean an increasingly effective voice for Europe in the councils of the Atlantic partnership, including the councils of the NATO alliance. Consultation with a united Europe will be more natural, less cumbersome, and more effective than consultation can possibly be today. Accordingly the practice of consultation is bound to encompass an increasingly large range of political, economic, and military matters. And we on our side, in phase with the new development of the European community, will have to adjust our own thinking and our habits.

We are, of course, heartened by the disposition of the new and stronger Europe to play a larger part in the common defense. Since World War II we have at all times identified our own security with the security of Western Europe. Indeed, so deep is our commitment that we could not possibly distinguish an attack upon Western Europe from an attack upon ourselves.

We maintain over 400,000 men in Europe, including the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. If dependents of these men are added, we have about 700,000 people constantly in Europe. We have made available over 20 tactical air squadrons. We maintain in place major stockpiles of nuclear and conventional weapons and a diversity of means of delivery. Given the size and character of the United States involvement in Europe, any notion that we might abandon our European commitment is destructive, chimerical, and false.

Yet, as much as anybody else, we understand that the present organization of the Atlantic alliance is not perfect. As much as anybody else, we understand that in the defense field, as in all others, we need the cross-fertilization of fruitful ideas.

For defense in the nuclear age is not simple. It is expensive; it is technically complex; it is something relatively new in the world; and it is constantly changing because of the rapid rate of technological development. The fact that my own country, within a very short period, has moved from reliance on massive retaliation to a search for the widest range of possible retaliatory measures is no accident of political fortune. It is an expression of the pace and the sweep of change that technology forces upon us.

For in the field of modern defense there is no received wisdom, no tablets of the law, no copy-books, not even any demonstrated military precepts. On the contrary, modern strategy is a continuous process of thought—a ceaseless framing, testing, refining, and modifying of different hypotheses. In the United States this process of inner dialog goes on all the time and in many places. It is conducted in the military staffs of the Defense Department, in exchanges between the Defense and State Departments, in the Congress and its committees, in the research institutions and the universities, and in some organs of the press.

A process of thought similar in scope and intensity is getting under way in Western Europe. And, in that connection, you, as members of parliaments, as links between peoples and governments, have a special role to play. You have the ability to study the operations of government. You have the power to ask hard questions and to elicit full and frank answers. You serve as a cross section of public opinion. You are, in other words, ideally placed to launch and to guide the

strategic debate that seems to us the necessary background to wise choice in security matters.

For a wide range of strategic problems confronts us, and the answers are neither obvious nor easy. Statesmen, as well as soldiers, must deal with the problems of survival. You have a responsibility to participate with your governments in defining the nature of the threat to Western security and the steps that can best be taken to provide safety for us all without inviting destruction. None of us can neglect these matters. But it is not enough to consider solely the details of strategic planning; we must also ask ourselves constantly whether we are contributing our fair share to the common defense, in terms of expenditures in relation to gross national product, in terms of manpower, in terms of other national assets. There can be no more critical matters for parliamentary consideration.

Need for Effective Conventional Forces

In the military field Europe shares with the United States responsibility for Western defense as a whole. It is our common duty to define the priority of needs. The most urgent need today is for the development of more effective conventional forces for NATO to complement the superior nuclear power already available to the alliance.

Hopefully, the contingencies most apt to arise in the future are not those likely to call forth a massive nuclear exchange. We can certainly expect localized political and military pressures, perhaps not too unlike the recent challenge in Cuba. Those pressures can best be met—as that challenge has been met—by whatever response is appropriate, involving as it may the deployment and selective use of conventional land, sea, and air forces.

Challenges may be presented at any one of a number of sensitive points. To meet them with steady nerve, without alarms, excursions, and wasteful deployment, we need stronger conventional forces than are now available. That is why it is essential that a Europe growing more powerful and more unified should make an increasing effort to further the buildup of conventional forces. The undertaking of such a buildup is not only necessary as a military matter if NATO is to have at its command the widest range of measured response; it would have a positive and

transforming effect on the European spirit. It would provide a critical increment of security and self-confidence that should give an even greater sense of assurance and achievement to what we have come to call the "new Europe."

The strengthening of conventional forces is, of course, eminently feasible. In population and gross national product, the NATO countries are more than a match for the Soviet Union and its East European satellites. NATO forces already dominate the sea. Our air strength is at least equal to that of the Soviet bloc. We do need more strength on the ground, not only in terms of manpower but in qualitative terms. We need more and better equipment and reserves of better quality and higher mobility. The additional effort required to make up these deficiencies can pay big dividends. There is no reason why the NATO countries cannot maintain in the NATO area conventional forces that are at least equal to those in Eastern Europe.

Let me draw on the Cuban experience for an illustration. Why were we able to modulate and attune our responses so closely to the degree of our need? Surely it was because we had the ability to deploy as required a very large variety of land, sea, and air forces in the fashion necessary to accomplish the task at hand. Because we had clear superiority of conventional forces, we were never confronted with the awful dilemma of having to utilize major nuclear weapons or to retreat from our objective.

In the same way we must increase the spectrum of our military choices on the continent of Europe. If we do so—always preserving intact the ultimate nuclear deterrent—we increase our ability to achieve the purposes of the alliance at the smallest risk of nuclear annihilation.

Europe's Role in Nuclear Defense

At the same time I understand fully that, as Europe grows stronger and more unified, as it develops an increasing sense of its own mission, it may wish to play a larger role in nuclear defense. From a strictly military standpoint, we do not feel that the alliance has an urgent need for a European nuclear contribution. But, should other NATO nations so desire, we are ready to give serious consideration to the creation of a genuinely multilateral medium-range ballistic missile force fully coordinated with the other deterrent forces

of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

It is not for us—indeed, it would be out of keeping with the spirit of the Atlantic partnership—to dictate how such a force should be manned, financed, or organized. But it is a proper responsibility of the United States, which has had so much experience in the nuclear field, to make available to others our information and ideas with respect to the characteristics and capabilities of a multilateral force. And we are now in the process of doing so.

In this connection one thing is clear. The faster Europe approaches unity, the more the nations of Europe hammer out common policies and common institutions, the easier it will be for us to work together as equal partners within the Atlantic partnership, employing NATO as the military expression of that partnership to achieve the indivisibility of response—the indivisibility of command and direction—that is the indispensable element of an effective defense in this nuclear age.

The Atlantic Partnership

America, as you will see from what I have said looks to the Atlantic partnership with a great sense of expectation. We envisage that partnership developing as a framework for useful address to all our common problems. If mutual self-interest is present—and it definitely is—we also believe that what Pericles said of the Athenians is true of ourselves: A noble principle underlies our work. It is the principle of shared responsibility. And we believe that the Atlantic nations act not only from self-interest but in the interest of all free men, that the Atlantic partnership is the expression of a noble principle and a model for free men and free nations everywhere.